

Basic Detail Report



George Bernard Shaw at Adelphi Terrace

Date

1927

Primary Maker

Sir John Lavery

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

61.7 x 76.2 cm

Description

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), the Irish critic and playwright, is seen in his wife's home, 10 Adelphi Terrace. Both Shaw and his wife Charlotte were close friends of the Lavery's. Shaw allowed Hazel to paint his portrait in 1925 which was most unsuccessful: Lavery later painted over it and sold it to an admirer of Shaw's in America. Shaw's wife Charlotte, whom he had married in 1898, was supposed to be in this 'conversation piece' but she refused to be painted, thus Shaw remains alone in the sitting-room, with a rather forlorn expression. Shaw lived at Adelphi Terrace for thirty years or more and this painting depicts one of his last days there before moving to Whitehall Court in 1928. (Catalogue Entry [28]: Hazel, Lady Lavery Society and Politics, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, 18 September - 3 November 1996, p. 224) Revealing his socialist beliefs, George Bernard Shaw's works are strongly influenced by his concern over class inequality and the exploitation of the working class. He was one of the Dublin workers' leading champions in Britain. He told a rally at the Royal Albert Hall in November 1913 that 'as a Dublin man' he wanted to apologise for the priests of Dublin', criticising them for preventing strikers' children from being brought to England for humanitarian relief. At the same rally at the Royal Albert Hall in November 1913 in support of the Dublin workers, Shaw said that he was 'utterly ashamed' of the 'employers of Dublin' whose opposition to the right of workers to join a union led to striking workers being 'locked out.' Shaw continued 'Why, even an Englishman could employ people at a decent trade union wage occasionally and make his business pay.' John Lavery was a friend of the playwright and he shows him here at his home at Adelphi Terrace, London, just two years after Shaw won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925. GB Shaw and his wife Charlotte Payne Townsend lived at 10 Adelphi Terrace for nearly 30 years until 1929 when their home was threatened by demolition. During the 1930s, Adelphi Terrace was subsequently demolished and replaced by an office block in 1936-8. Adelphi Terrace was a fashionable address with rooms overlooking the River Thames. Located between the Strand and the River Thames the Adelphi district was originally developed in the 18th century by the Adam brothers John, Robert, James and William. The terrace was London's first neo-classical building, consisting of eleven large houses originally with vaulted wharves beneath. Charlotte Payne Townsend married Shaw in 1898 and 10 Adelphi Terrace was already her London apartment prior to

her marriage. Charlotte Payne Townsend had rented the flat 12 years earlier in order to help Sidney and Beatrice Webb to found the London School of Economics. She paid the Webbs £300 a year and endowed the LSE library with a grant of £1,000; she also endowed a woman's scholarship to the LSE. Having started its life at 10 Adelphi Terrace, the London School of Economics moved to its own building at Clare Market in 1902. Among the distinguished friends of George Bernard Shaw who came to 10 Adelphi Terrace were the photographer EO Hoppe and the American writer Mark Twain. As well as enjoying the process of being photographed, Shaw was a keen and respected photographer and had amassed around 20,000 photographic objects during his long lifetime, including prints, negatives and albums. These photographs included a number of the River Thames taken from the viewpoint of his home at Adelphi Terrace. In the background of Lavery's portrait of Shaw at Adelphi Terrace Auguste Rodin's bust of Shaw is visible indicating the pride of place it had in Shaw's home. Writing to Hugh Lane regarding the donation to Lane's Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin by Shaw of a marble bust of Shaw by Rodin, Shaw wrote 'I..much rather the bust were under your care in the quite extraordinarily good collection you have founded in my native city than hidden in a private house which already possesses an even more cherished masterpiece in the bronze cast taken from the original plaster.' Rodin was consulted as to his views on the marble bust of Shaw being donated to the Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin in 1908. Rodin's telegram in a reply simply said: 'Yes, enchanted.' Hailing from Co Cork, Charlotte Payne Townsend shared her husband's philanthropic spirit. When an appeal for books was issued following the burning by the Black and Tans of the Cork Public Library on 12 December 1920, Charlotte Payne Townsend unhesitatingly dispatched from Adelphi Terrace a selection of books. Writing to the Cork librarian she described them as 'a miscellaneous assortment, first weeding from the library here, but you say you want 'every class of book,' so I hope you may find something useful among them.' Over the intervening years she would become the single largest donor of books to the Cork Public Library. (JO'D)